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Current Affairs - 17 November 2025

DELHI'S AIR, A 'WICKED PROBLEM' IN NEED OF BOLD SOLUTIONS

- Each winter, as a **grey haze descends upon Delhi** and **air pollution reaches severe levels**, the city returns to a predictable yet devastating cycle.
- Schools close, flights are cancelled, and citizens don masks as the **Air Quality Index (AQI) breaches 400**.
- Yet this recurring crisis is treated as a **seasonal inconvenience** rather than a **chronic public-health emergency** and a **deep structural failure**.

Structural Roots of a Persistent Crisis

- Despite repeated **round tables, expert meetings, and policy discussions**, progress remains minimal.
- Long-term exposure to Delhi's toxic air can **reduce life expectancy by up to 10 years**, while air pollution costs the country **1.36% of its GDP**, over **\$36 billion annually**.
- Instead of long-term solutions, governments often resort to **short-term fixes** such as **cloud-seeding** or **air purifiers in offices**.
- Delhi's geographical position, a **basin flanked by the Aravalli hills**, creates natural barriers to air dispersal.
- Winter's **temperature inversion** and **low wind speeds** trap pollutants close to the surface, turning the city into a **bowl of poison**.

Human Choices That Intensify the Problem

- Human activity worsens the crisis significantly. Delhi NCR's **3.3 crore vehicles**, many diesel-powered and poorly regulated, continuously release **nitrogen oxides and PM2.5**.
- Enforcement of **BS-VI norms** remains **inadequate**. Construction contributes nearly **27% of PM2.5 pollution**, with **dust-control norms** routinely violated.
- Industries in neighbouring states emit **sulphur dioxide and other toxins**, often using **outdated technologies**.
- Meanwhile, **stubble-burning in Punjab and Haryana**, despite subsidies and court orders, remains widespread because farmers lack **economically viable alternatives**.



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- Seasonal activities such as **Deepavali firecrackers** and **open waste burning** create further dangerous spikes.
- Delhi's air crisis is thus a **wicked problem, multifaceted, cross-cutting, and politically entangled**, requiring more than isolated interventions.

A Rare Window of Political Alignment

- For the first time, Delhi and the surrounding NCR states, **Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan**, are governed by the **same political party** as the central government.
- This is a **unique chance** to eliminate **intergovernmental friction** and launch a **joint Clean Air Mission** with **scientific expertise, coordinated enforcement, and shared accountability**.
- Global models offer clear guidance. **London** implemented an **Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)**, modernised transport, and improved building efficiency.
- **Los Angeles** enforced **strict vehicle-emission standards** and promoted **clean fuel technologies**.
- **Beijing's** **airpocalypse** led to sweeping reforms: **relocating industries, banning coal, and deploying real-time monitoring**, achieving a **35% reduction in PM2.5 levels** in five years.
- Delhi must adopt its own **Unified Airshed Management Plan**, treating the NCR as **one pollution zone**, with **real-time public dashboards, electrified public transport, and strict dust and waste regulations**.
- Farmers need **scaled-up access to Happy Seeders and bio-decomposers** to make stubble management **economically feasible**.

Beyond Policy: The Behavioural Dimension

- Air pollution is not only a governance issue but a **behavioural challenge**.
 - Citizens must recognise that **clean air is a shared responsibility**. **Awareness campaigns, school programmes, and community initiatives** can shift mindsets and build a culture of accountability.
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INDIA'S ROLE IN GLOBAL PRECISION MEDICINE MARKET

- **Precision biotherapeutics** refers to medical interventions optimised for a patient's **specific genetic or molecular profile**, rather than relying on generalised population-level data.
- This approach allows for **early diagnosis, personalised treatment, and fewer adverse effects**.
- Key technologies shaping this field include:
 - **Genomic and Proteomic Analysis:** Decoding individual genetic and protein signatures to identify disease-causing mutations.
 - **Gene Editing Therapies:** Tools like **CRISPR-Cas9** modify defective genes to correct underlying causes of disorders such as **thalassemia** and **sickle-cell anaemia**.
 - **mRNA and Nucleic Acid Therapeutics:** These therapies, popularised during the COVID-19 pandemic, use RNA molecules to instruct cells to produce or suppress specific proteins.
 - **Monoclonal Antibodies and Biologics:** Laboratory-engineered molecules that precisely target disease-related proteins, used in treatments for **cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and autoimmune diseases**.
 - **AI-Driven Drug Discovery:** Machine learning models analyse vast datasets to predict molecule interactions, accelerating the discovery of new drugs.
- Together, these technologies represent a shift from **symptom management** to **disease correction at the molecular level**, offering transformative potential for chronic and genetic illnesses.

India's Position in the Precision Medicine Ecosystem

- India contributes nearly **65% of deaths** from **non-communicable diseases**, underscoring the need for advanced diagnostic and therapeutic approaches.



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- The country's **diverse genetic landscape**, one of the most complex in the world, makes it an ideal testing ground for precision biotherapeutics.
- **Research and Institutional Strength**
 - The **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** has identified **precision biotherapeutics** as one of six focus areas under its **Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment (BioE3)**
- **Genomic Initiatives and Localisation**
 - Projects like **GenomeIndia** and **IndiGen** are building reference genomic databases representing India's vast population diversity.
 - Such datasets enable **customisation of global drug molecules** to Indian genetic profiles, addressing the common issue where **foreign-developed drugs** show **reduced efficacy** among Indian patients.
- **Challenges Hindering India's Precision Medicine Growth**
 - **Regulatory Gaps:** There is no unified framework governing gene and cell therapies. Current regulations are fragmented and unclear on therapeutic use.
 - **High Cost and Limited Access:** Advanced biotherapeutics remain **affordable only to urban elite**, with costs running into lakhs per treatment.
 - **Manufacturing Bottlenecks:** India lacks large-scale facilities for biologics and cell-based therapies, forcing dependence on imports.
 - **Ethical and Data Privacy Concerns:** Genomic data, if not protected by robust **data protection laws and consent frameworks**, risks misuse and discrimination.
 - Addressing these gaps is crucial for India to emerge as a trusted global leader in **affordable precision healthcare**.

Opportunities for Growth

- Collaborations with global institutions, coupled with government support under **'Make in India'** for **Biotech**, could position India as a **global hub for precision therapeutics** in the next decade.
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THE POCSO ACT IS GENDER-NEUTRAL BY DESIGN

- The Supreme Court recently issued notice in a case involving a woman accused of **penetrative sexual assault** under Section 3 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.
- This decision has reignited debate on **whether the law applies equally to all genders**.
- While the petitioner asserts that the Act is **gender-specific**, a comprehensive examination shows that **POCSO is inherently gender-neutral**.

Interpretation of the Supreme Court's Judgement: A Gender-Neutral Reading of Section 3

- **The General Clauses Act and Gendered Pronouns**
 - The petition argues that Section 3 applies only to male offenders because it uses the pronoun
 - However, Section 13(1) of the **General Clauses Act (GCA), 1897** states that **words importing the masculine gender shall be taken to include females**.
 - Since the POCSO Act does not explicitly restrict perpetrators to men, the law must be read in a **gender-neutral manner**.
- **Breadth of Acts Defined Under Section 3**
 - Section 3 defines penetrative sexual assault in a manner that encompasses:
 - **Digital penetration**
 - **Object penetration**
 - **Oral penetration**
 - Acts where a person **induces the child to perform sexual acts** with themselves or others.
 - These are offences that **can be committed by individuals of any gender**, reinforcing that the statute's construction is **gender-inclusive**.

Legislative Intent: Evidence of Deliberate Neutrality

- **Government Clarifications**



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- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has repeatedly affirmed that POCSO is a **gender-neutral Act**.
- These official responses demonstrate a **clear legislative intention**.
- **The 2019 Amendment's Statement of Objects and Reasons**
 - When the **POCSO Amendment Bill (2019)** was introduced, it explicitly described the Act as **gender-neutral**, leaving little room for restrictive interpretations.
- **Why Gender-Specific Interpretation Would Be Incorrect?**
 - While one parliamentary reply emphasised that the Act protects **boys also**, this cannot be misread to imply that only victims are gender-neutral while perpetrators are not.
 - For comparison, Section 63 of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023** (erstwhile IPC Section 375) uses the explicitly gendered terms **a man and a woman**.
 - The **absence of such language** in POCSO reflects a **deliberate legislative choice** to ensure **broad applicability**.

Conclusion

- A holistic analysis of the statute, its legislative history, and its protective intent demonstrates that the **POCSO Act is designed to be gender-neutral**.
 - Interpreting Section 3 to apply only to male offenders would contradict both the **letter** and **spirit** of the law.
 - To fulfil its core objective, **comprehensive protection of children**, the Act must continue to be applied **irrespective of the perpetrator's gender**.
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CAG'S NEW AUDIT PRIORITIES IN INDIA'S PATH TOWARD VIKSIT BHARAT

2047

- On Audit Diwas (16 November), Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) K. Sanjay Murthy **outlined an expanded set of national audit priorities**.



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- Audit Diwas commemorates the appointment of **India's first Auditor-General in 1860**, marking the institution's 166th year.
- The shift aligns with the national vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047** and **evolving governance challenges**.

Key Audit Focus Areas Announced by the CAG:

- **Urban governance audit - Reinvigorated audits of Urban Local Governments (ULBs):**
- **MSME sector audit - Ease of Doing Business for MSMEs:**
- **Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) audit:**
- **Audit of multimodal logistics and Indian railways (under PM Gati Shakti framework):**

Challenges:

- **Data gaps** and poor digital readiness among ULBs and MSME departments.
- **Coordination issues** in multimodal logistics across multiple agencies.
- **Ensuring cybersecurity** and privacy with digital audit tools.
- **Integration of AI systems** like CAG-LLM into traditional audit workflows.
- **Standardising frameworks** for measuring Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business across states.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthen digital capabilities** of states, ULBs, and MSME agencies.
 - **Institutionalise** AI-supported auditing and data analytics.
 - **Expand audits** to include climate resilience, smart city projects, and social sector delivery.
 - **Enhance stakeholder consultations** for the multimodal transport audit.
 - **Promote inter-ministerial coordination** for PM Gati Shakti evaluations.
 - **Build workforce** capacity through continuous training and certification.
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E-JAGRITI PLATFORM



The e-Jagruti Platform has emerged as a transformative digital grievance redressal system, registering over two lakh users since its launch on January 1, 2025.

- The e-Jagruti is a flagship initiative by the **Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.**
- It is aimed at strengthening the **consumer dispute redressal system** across the country.
- **Features of e-Jagruti Platform:**
 - **Inclusivity:** It has features like **multilingual interfaces** and accessibility tools that make it user-friendly for diverse demographics.
 - **Integrated Platforms:** It integrates legacy systems like **Online Case Monitoring System (OCMS), E-Daakhil, NCDRC Case Monitoring System, CONFONET OCMS, e-Daakhil, NCDRC CMS and CONFONET** into a single, seamless interface.
 - **AI-Powered smart search:** It has case filing, online fee payment, case monitoring modules for seamless disposal of cases by all the Commissions, has Smart search facility on archived consumer complaints / cases / judgements **using AI technology for metadata and keyword creation.**
 - **Global Accessibility:** NRIs and citizens can file and manage cases from any location, with secure end-to-end encryption and role-based permissions.
 - It enables consumers to file complaints, track case statuses, and **access judgments online.**
 - The platform plays a vital role in **digitizing consumer commissions** and empowering citizens by providing easy access to legal remedies.
 - It provides simple, fast and a more cost-effective consumer disputes redressal software solution at all levels.



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KEY FACTS ABOUT SILIGURI CORRIDOR



Amid shifting regional dynamics following the change of regime in Bangladesh and concerns over China's growing presence near the vulnerable Siliguri corridor, the Indian

Army has reinforced its eastern frontier by establishing three new garrison locations.

- It is a **narrow stretch of land in West Bengal** that connects India's mainland to its northeastern states.
- It is around **170 km long and 60 km in width**, with its **narrowest section** being just **20-22 km**.
- Overall, it is **12,200 sq.km.** in area.
- This corridor shares its **border with Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh** and is only **130 km** away from China's Chumbi Valley.
- Its geographical fragility and criticality have earned it the **nickname "Chicken's Neck"** in strategic and military circles.
- It is the **only land link between our Northeast region and the rest of the country**.
- Any disruption in this corridor — be it from military conflict, natural disaster, or internal unrest — would sever India's northeastern states from the rest of the country.